## Transatlantic Temporalities: Góngora and the Times of the Giants

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In his testimonial film, *Nostalgia de la luz* (2010), Patricio Guzmán conflates the astronomical search for cosmic origins with the archeological search for the human and evolutionary past, by depicting the play of time and space in the Chilean Atacama Desert, whose dryness affords astronomers the clearest skies and archeologists the most well-preserved remains. From the desert observatory telescopes peer through increasingly earlier moments of space-time, while along desert landscapes archeologists trace back layers of sedimentary rock to expose fossils and petroglyphs, and to examine in plain sight the ruins of 19th century mining towns amid the skeletons of their inhabitants.

In this context, Guzmán interrogates the Atacama's most notorious recent history as the site of the Chacabuco concentration camp, housed in an old miner's compound, and the desert sands themselves, now a graveyard for the fragmentary remains of Pinochet's "desaparecidos." Through his poignant interviews with survivors, stars become the space of memory, in a convergence of physics and *testimonio* evocative of myth.

Indeed, myth marks the earliest considerations of the relationship between the cosmic and the social. As Stephen Scully has pointed out, the central preoccupation of Hesiod's *Theogony* and the associated myths of the *Oresteia* is precisely the relationship between the generation of the cosmos and the creation of civil society, in the resolution of civic violence figured as primordial family strife.

The *Theogony* narrates the origins of the gods, the birth of the Titans out of the union of earth and sky, and how the youngest of these, Cronus, rebelled against his father, Uranus. When Cronus castrates Uranus, the blood from the severed genitals fell to earth, generating new beings; among these, an army of giants and the monstrous Erinyes or Furies, goddesses of vengeance. Cronus then confronts the revolt of his own son, Zeus, who struggles for a new divine order, first by defeating the Titans (Titanomachy) and then the Giants (Gigantomachy), although as Morford and Lenardon point out, in the tradition these two battles are frequently conflated. The Giants, upon defeat, are imprisoned under the earth, their rumblings periodically surfacing as volcanic eruptions (Morford and Lenardon 21-35; Hesiod 93, 129-31, 139-43).

The *Oresteia* echoes these struggles of the gods on earth in the chain of family violence within the house of Atreus, elaborated in the classical Greek dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. In this tale Orestes, following Apollo, avenges his father by committing the crime of matricide; in response he is pursued by the Furies, who defend the earlier matriarchal order. Caught between two conflicting agents of divine justice, Orestes submits his case to Athenian court. There Athena rules in favor of Apollo, asserting stability and civic order over instinct and blind vengeance (Kitto 84-85).

These myths, whether the war of the Titans, the war of the giants, or the Orestes saga, have all been viewed in terms of the conflict between civilization and nature, a conflict which informed Freud's classic work and which also has been interpreted in historical and anthropological terms. For some, the myths reflect the conquest of the Minoan matriarchal culture of Crete by mainland Mycenaean patriarchal culture, resulting in a syncretic mixture of Indo-European and Oriental

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Scully (3-8); see also Malcolm Read for a psychoanalytic reading of "dwarfs and giants" in the *Soledades* and *Polifemo*.

religions (Morford and Lenardon 29). If the myths themselves were a symbolic representation of historical communal strife, they also become an imaginary for the figuring of later historical clashes of civilizations.

For the Baroque poet, Luis de Góngora, these early myths become a vocabulary for guarded and camouflaged protest, within a contemporary ecumenist framework, against the exclusionary concept of an old Christian Spanish nation. I propose to look at the imagery of gigantomachy, the war of the giants, and related myths in a selection of Góngora's work, first by contextualizing an image in his major lyric poem, the *Soledades* (c. 1613-1626)<sup>2</sup>, then by approaching the topic of syncretism in his Sacromonte sonnet and finally by exploring a curious paratextual gesture in the postdating of Góngora's sonnet on the Escorial.

Góngora ends his *Soledades* with a scene of falconry, read by John Beverley as an allegory of European war, as the falcons are each associated with different nations as well as with contemporary weapons. One of the birds is marked as American, and referred to as an "aleto," a Peruvian falcon mentioned by Inca Garcilaso in his *Comentarios reales*. Antonio Alatorre, echoed by Muriel Elvira, points to the resemblance of the word "aleto" with the name of one of the Furies, "Alecto" (Alatorre 95; Elvira 137). The Furies, as noted, were generated out of early heavenly violence and play a key role in the Orestes myth, in their persistent haunting of the hero, symbolizing blood guilt in a family divided. In this subtle allusion to the colonial "aleto," Góngora evokes the political program of his mentor, Pedro de Valencia. Valencia, a Humanist with intellectual roots in the Hebraist School of Burgos, argued that Spain should turn from overseas expansion to focus instead on internal reform and national integration, promoting an economy driven by labor and agriculture rather than on the influx of American precious metal (Magnier 20, 382-84). In this context, he argued in his Tratado acerca de los moriscos de España (1606) for the evangelization of the Moriscos, the Iberian Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity, rather than supporting their mass expulsion. Valencia supported the Pauline concept of equality for all baptized Christians, regardless of convert status (Magnier 243-88). In evoking the figure of the aleto, marked by its curious mythic association in a catalog of birds and nations, Góngora underscores both the problem of communal conflict in Spain—the family divided<sup>4</sup>— as well as the persistent problem of the consequences of the American conquest as a drain on the economy.

In Góngora's Sacromonte sonnet (1598), the war of the giants frames a different commentary on the problem of national integration. The poem was written to celebrate the Sacromonte discoveries: relics of martyrs, disciples of St. James, who left behind lead books, said to contain Gospels written in Arabic on Spanish soil.<sup>5</sup> Some critics have read the sonnet as a rather straightforward Christian-pagan opposition (Fuchs 116; Fernández Dougnat 326). However, I believe that this sense of opposition can be expanded. I would suggest that in the sonnet, Góngora identifies the revolt of the giants with the revolt of the Moriscos, an equation which becomes significant in the iconography and imagery of the expulsion, and a more specific reference in this

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jammes estimates the dates of composition in his edition of the poem (14-20).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Soledades II.773; Alatorre 95; Roses 367-69, Elvira 28-30, n. 42-43, cites the references to *Comentarios reales*, Bk IX, Ch 14 and Bk VIII, Ch 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Childers notes Oresteia imagery in propaganda of the period, which casts the conflict between Moriscos and Old Christians as a family quarrel (175-76).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Robert Jammes on the context of the sonnet in Góngora's production (194-95).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Magnier (49-50). As Magnier writes, "When Philip went on a state visit to Portugal in 1619 the expulsion of the Moriscos was recalled at the point of disembarkation of the royal party. In an elaborate celebratory structure, the fable of the Titans, who had rebelled against Jupiter, was used as an analogy for the relationship between the Moriscos and the king. An inscription reads: 'Philip, our Jupiter, punished, banishes and casts into darkest Africa

poem, I believe, to the repressed revolt of the Alpujarras. The poem appears to argue that Granada should be known, not for a destructive gigantomachy—the revolt of the Alpujarras—, but rather for its spiritual giants:

## Al monte santo de Granada

Este monte de cruces coronado, cuya siempre dichosa excelsa cumbre espira luz y no vomita lumbre, Etna glorioso, Mongibel sagrado, trofeo es dulcemente levantado, no ponderosa grave pesadumbre para oprimir sacrílega costumbre de bando contra el cielo conjurado. Gigantes, miden sus ocultas faldas, que a los cielos hicieron fuerza, aquella, que los cielos padecen, fuerza santa. Sus miembros cubre y sus reliquias sella la bien pisada tierra. Veneradlas con tiernos ojos, con devota planta. (2000, 176)

The discoveries at Sacromonte, revealed to be fraudulent, represent, in Barbara Fuch's terms, a case of "found syncretism" (99-117). They are considered to be a form of pseudogenealogy, a transfer to a regional and ethnic level of the mythical genealogy meant to associate the Hapsburg emperor with antiquity and the sacred, such as Marie Tanner has described. This phenomenon has been demonstrated in great detail in Mercedes García Arenal's and other studies of the finds, which describe a context of false chronicles, poems and histories designed to legitimate New Christian populations, regional cities, families and individuals with an invented heritage (García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano; Castillo Fernández). García Arenal has shown how the Lead Books were used to incorporate the founding Jewish and Muslim populations of Spain into the Messianic ideology of the Spanish empire by stripping them of their religious identity, "making the Arabs Christians" and "the Jews Spaniards" who descended from the lost tribes of Israel, not involved in the crucifixion of Christ (581). It is in this context that Góngora may well have expressed, at times, converso sensibilities, along the lines that Andrée Collard, Colbert Nepaulsingh and Daniel Waissbein have suggested, "under the bark" of regional patriotism and Christian Messianism, negotiating conflicting interests. Various tensions would come to characterize the debate over the *libros plúmbeos*, between a critical philology informed by School of Burgos Hebraism and the defenders of the authenticity of the books, the so-called *laminarios* or sarraceni who have been associated with the Andalusian aristocracy, who were Góngora's

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the Moriscos who, repeating the foolhardy daring of the Giants, by not observing the faith they professed, rebelled against Peace and the Spanish Heaven.' (Trans. from Latin Magnier).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Collard, Nepaulsingh and Waissbein all argued, at different moments, for a converso consciousness in Góngora, with Waissbein using Góngora's notion of "corteza" from the poet's "Carta en respuesta," and Nepaulsingh suggesting Maimonides as the source for such camouflaging techniques. Góngora's converso ancestry, once hotly debated, has now been proven by Enrique Soria Mesa.

regional patron base.<sup>8</sup> The debates over the books would also reveal tensions between new currents of historiography–between critical and apologetic histories—to use Alvar Esquerra and Montcher's terms (25)—and between the sacred and scientific application of Humanist scholarship to the problem of historical veracity.<sup>9</sup> Some of this comes to bear upon the last poem we will study, Góngora's sonnet on the Escorial.

Góngora's sonnet on the Escorial is thought by Antonio Carreira to have been composed around 1589 in the context of the poet's trips to Madrid in the previous year (Góngora 2009, 156; Cf. Jammes 221). Dating Góngora's work can be problematic. It is commonplace to remark the disparity between the great care with which the poet perfected his production and the great disarray with which he attended to its preservation; to such an extent, as Mercedes Blanco recently noted, that he was reduced to begging for copies (Talk, Haverford College, April 10, 2015). Or trying to buy them up (Carreira 80). We are, however, fortunate to have a final manuscript of Góngora's works, painstakingly prepared in collaboration with the poet by Antonio Chacón and ultimately sold for the library of the emerging new royal favorite, the Conde Duque de Olivares. The Chacón manuscript is considered definitive because the poet was able to review it, although Carreira and, more recently, Amelia Paz note gaps and apparent errors (Carreira 75-94; Paz). Indeed, they both cite a number of cases in which poems are dated earlier than the event they celebrate, although usually the dates are close. For Paz, the textual definition of the Chacón manuscript is the product of a multitude of suppositions about what the dating actually means (70). 10

In this context, Carreira corrects Chacóns's date for the Escorial sonnet—1609—since the final verses wish long life to Felipe II, who died much earlier, in 1598. Indeed, the dating of this sonnet, "manifestamente errónea," sticks out like a sore thumb, even in a less than perfect manuscript (Paz 73). Yet I will suggest that the significance of the date, 1609, that of the first order of expulsion of the Moriscos, and the manifest discrepancy it represents in a sonnet calling for long life to Felipe II and his monument, was no random error. Rather, I will suggest that the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Gaspar Morocho Gayo describes these tensions in his introduction to Pedro de Valencia's writings on the Lead Books and states that "El antijudaísmo es uno de los ejes doctrinales de los libros plúmbeos" (270) and he associates the Eboli clan with the *sarraceni* (193).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> On the implication of the Lead Books debate in the development of Humanist disciplines and in the shift in historiography from a sacred to a secular-scientific model, see García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano (2013) and Seth Kimmel. Kimmel's book treats this question in a transatlantic context, arguing that "the long struggle to eliminate the last traces of Judaism and Islam from Spain and to convert indigenous peoples in the Americas revolutionized canon law, language study and history writing" (173). For more general sources, see Paolo Rossi and Kagan, *Clio*. Alfredo Alvar Esquerra and Fabien Montcher describe the shift in historiography of the period through Cervantes's eyes: "He witnessed the change in 'doing history,' which was transformed from the creation of wild and imaginative histories to a search for reliable sources on which to base the assertions of history" (16). See also Gerli on Cervantes's "Rewriting myth and history" (1995, 40-60).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The date of composition in Góngora's poems is usually estimated through reference to Góngora's biography and to the date of events mentioned in the poem in question. Dates of composition given by Chacón could reflect later corrections (or conversely, anticipated commissions), which would explain the lack of correspondence between the date of composition and the events described. Amelia Paz suggests that there may have been a lag between composition and delivery of the poem to a collector who may have supplied an initial manuscript with dates to Góngora, perhaps the one the poet had so desperately tried to buy up, even at the expense of "un ojo de la cara" (78). She also notes a generalized tolerance for approximation in the documents of the period (78). However, the discrepancy in Chacón's dating of the Escorial sonnet does stand out within the volume; most discrepancies Carreira reports in his essay involve a difference of only a year. Paz also finds a minimal number of years involved in discrepancies except for a couple of cases in which poems were published, thereby creating a gap between dating of manuscript and print versions (62).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> There is only one other case of the sort of extreme discrepancy found in the dating of the Escorial sonnet, a converse case of "predating" to 1609 (to the reign of Felipe III) of a *romance* written to celebrate the palace of

conspicuous dating of the finalized version as 1609 functions as a defamiliarizing gesture meant to provoke in the reader a contemplation of the disastrous consequences of the expulsion. In this sense the dating would be a paratextual commentary related to the *vaticinia post eventum* of the expulsion—the prophecies after the fact—found in other works of the period written by both proponents and opponents of the measure.<sup>12</sup> If I am correct in this hypothesis, the meaning of the sonnet is expanded by the possibility of multiple temporal horizons of reception.

Let's turn now to read the Escorial sonnet, first within the horizon of the original time frame of composition, around 1589:

De San Lorenzo el Real del Escurial

Sacros, altos, dorados capiteles, que a las nubes borráis sus arreboles: Febo os teme por más lucientes soles, y el cielo por gigantes más crüeles.

Depón tus rayos, Júpiter; no celes los tuyos, Sol: de un templo son faroles, que al mayor mártir de los españoles erigió el mayor rey de los fieles.

religiosa grandeza del monarca cuya diestra real al Nuevo Mundo abrevia, y el oriente se le humilla.

Perdone el tiempo, lisonjee la Parca, la beldad desta octava maravilla, los años deste Salomón segundo. (2009, 156)

The sonnet presents the height and luminosity of the Escorial as so great as to prompt fear in the heavens of a new gigantomachy, fears which are then apparently put to rest by the identification of the monument, followed by its association with the religious and imperial grandeur of the king. Both king and monument are then wished long life, with the Escorial presented as the new eighth wonder and temple of Solomon.

The sonnet appears, on face value, to be a rather conventional Gongorine praise poem (see Chaffee-Sorace), appropriating the Jewish foundations of Christian Messianism –the Temple of Solomon—in the cause of extolling Habsburg imperial destiny. <sup>13</sup> I was thus initially hesitant to read the poem within its original time frame as a "false *loa*," as scholars such as Luján and Waissbein have suggested. Even critics, such as Pedro de Valencia's mentor, Arias Montano, and

Felipe IV and Isabel de Borbón (Paz 73). Their dynastic marriage, evoked by their home, signals peace with the French but perhaps also nods to the pragmatic Christian ecumenism of Isabel's father, Henry IV of France, who converted to Catholicism from Protestantism, the French Huguenots having been earlier allied with the cause of Morisco revolt in the time leading up to the 1609 expulsion orders.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See Magnier (112) on Lope, and Michael Gerli, "Xadraque Xarife's Prophecy." I would like to thank Michael Gerli for his generosity in sharing his draft essay and for suggesting the parallel use of the device of prophecy after the fact in the *Persiles*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Magnier (232).

his friend, José de Sigüenza, librarian of El Escorial, were committed to designing the Escorial as a new Solomon's temple according to archeological and biblical sources, complete with a library and archive which functioned as a center for Humanist activity (Magnier 232; Kamen 2010). Another critical Humanist associated with Góngora's circle, Ambrosio de Morales, was also consulted, and early on, regarding the design and the library (Kagan, 2009 110). On the other hand, the identification of Phillip II with Solomon was never purely panegyric. The campaign to decorate the Escorial in Solomonic imagery has been strongly linked to the projects of religious tolerance and judeoconverso integration and construed as an antecedent to the use of the Lead Books by Morisco intellectuals to promote the acceptance of their own people (Ingram 146; García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano 2009).

Given the critical legacy of the Hebraists in Góngora's humanist circle, it is possible that the sonnet might imply, ever so cautiously, a critique of the vanity of religious ostentation and regal excess such as Luján and Waissbein have argued. It is not insignificant in this regard that the Escorial was dedicated to Saint Lawrence, martyred for his defense of the poor as the true "riches of the Church" (Attwater 214). Around the time of the sonnet's original composition, in 1588, Lucrecia de León echoed peasant protests in her visionary critique of Habsburg pretensions, in dreams which criticized Felipe II for building the Escorial while oppressing the poor through taxation and selling off common lands. The Escorial remained a figure of contrast in political and spiritual will into the Expulsion debate. The postdating to 1609, and at the time of the Chacón compilation of the early 1620s, —precisely when Olivares was anxious to undo the damage to the economy caused by the expulsion might imbue the poem with a retrospective meaning which would include all of Góngora's historical and aesthetic experience up to that point at the end of his career.

This would have included his associations with the dukes of Medina Sidonia and Pedro de Valencia, both known to have had links to Lucrecia de León's group (Kagan 1990, 127; Magnier 80 n. 136). It would have included familiarity with Pedro de Valencia's social writings in support of agrarian reform that explicitly equate "los poderosos" with Homer's own giant, the cyclops, Polyphemus, protesting that they feed on the poor (Magnier 300; Blanco; Valencia 1605). It would also have included his use in the Soledades of a similarly defamiliarizing technique of temporal shifting and play with the conventions of prophecy—recently noted by Muriel Elvira (96-98; 122-23). And it would have recurred to his use of imagery in that same long lyric poem, considered his master work, which suggests an opposition to the expulsion of the Moriscos, sharpened by the addition of the last 43 lines at the insistence of none other than his final editor, Antonio Chacón. 16 For Góngora's mentor, Valencia, the king was to be a rey pastor, protecting his subjects, which included all baptized Christians, regardless of their convert status (Magnier 381-92). By dating the sonnet 1609, Góngora poses the question: Were both king and son "gigantes crueles," exemplars of imperial excess, or paragons of Solomonic wisdom? In the context of the contemporary reevaluation of the policies of the previous regime, the postdating would have been a poignant gesture.

My thesis of intentional postdating, evoking the possibility of shifting meanings within multiple temporal horizons of reception, recalls the dynamics of the short story by Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*." In the story, Pierre Menard embarks on the absurd mission to write an original twentieth-century *Quijote*, which is word-for-word identical to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See, for example, the anonymous "Discurso antiguo en materia de moriscos" (Janer 266-68).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Dadson (193).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Chemris (2016, 2019 and 2021).

Cervantes text. In depicting this quixotic venture, Borges plays with the notion that the same literal wording might acquire different meanings in different historical contexts. Yet the parallel with the short story is actually deeper, along the lines of Daniel Balderston's reading of Borges, in which pointed omissions, dates, fragmented "textual marks" and plays with temporal frame signal an oblique aesthetic intervention into contemporary historical and political debates (1-51; 16). The "textual marks" I have studied in Góngora are similarly subtle windows into historical context and guarded opposition. If, indeed, Borges was inspired by the Spanish Baroque, we can perhaps also better understand Góngora through the reversed temporality of his trajectory.

The vocabulary of mythic cosmic and civic strife afforded Góngora an opportunity to interrogate his historical moment in images which suggest the juxtaposition of buried history and reverberations of cosmic time of Guzmán's film. Yet unlike Guzmán's film, Góngora's lyric protest against religious exclusion and imperial greed cannot be said to be a form of testimonio. Góngora was a courtly poet who wrote to appeal to aristocratic patrons who relied on Morisco agricultural labor, but who also engaged in the suppression of the Alpujarras revolt (Chemris 2016, 20 n. 16). While his Humanist mentor, Pedro de Valencia, spoke out against the cruelties of the expulsion, the conquest and imperial excess, Valencia's program did not extend beyond that of an integrated Christian agrarian nation whose king protected the poor (Chemris 2016, especially 20 n. 4; Kagan 2009, 197). As Spanish early modernists continue to incorporate new work in colonial, medieval and Islamic studies, as well as the proliferation of research associated with the Góngora quadricentennial, we will undoubtedly know more about Góngora's sympathies with New Christian and indigenous populations.<sup>17</sup> It is my hope that this will in turn inform our archeology as critics, as we unearth the various layers of his texts in an effort to recover voices lost to history, within a greater exploration of the symbolic representation of Hispanic struggles for civil society, in constellation across time.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See Chemris on Góngora's relationship to Inca Garcilaso (2021).

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